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A Tale of Two Stories: Unsettling a Settler Family's History in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Abstract: On the morning of the 5 November 1881, my great-grandfather stood alongside 1588 other military men, waiting to commence the invasion of Parihaka pā, home to the great pacifist leaders Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi and their people. Having contributed to the military campaign against the pā, he returned some years later as part of the agricultural campaign to complete the alienation of Taranaki iwi from their land in Aotearoa New Zealand. None of this detail appears in any of the stories I was raised with. I grew up Pākehā (i.e., a descendant of people who came to Aotearoa from Europe as part of the process of colonisation) and so my stories tend to conform to orthodox settler narratives of ‘success, inevitability, and rights of belonging’. This article is an attempt to right that wrong. In it, I draw on insights from the critical family history literature to explain the nature, purposes and effects of the (non)narration of my great-grandfather’s participation in the military invasion of Parihaka in late 1881. On the basis of a more historically comprehensive and contextualised account of the acquisition of three family farms, I also explore how the control of land taken from others underpinned the creation of new settler subjectivities and created various forms of privilege that have flowed down through the generations. Family histories shape the ways in which we make sense of and locate ourselves in the places we live, and those of us whose roots reach back to the destructive practices of colonisation have a particular responsibility to ensure that such narratives do not conform to comfortable type. This article is an attempt to unsettle my settler family narrative.



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1. Introduction

My great-grandfather, Andrew Gilhooly, was one of the 1589 men who invaded Parihaka, in Aotearoa New Zealand (Aotearoa), on the 5 November 1881. A member of the Armed Constabulary's (AC) No. 3 Company, he remained at Parihaka as part of an occupying garrison until late 1884. Having participated in the military campaign against the pā, Andrew was back some years later as part of the agricultural campaign, purchasing title to a farm in 1895 that had once been part of Parihaka's extensive cultivations. In time, he would lease a second farm on a large parcel of land that had been granted to Te Whiti o Rongomai in the late 1880s, while his wife, Kate, would buy her own property, one the colonial authorities had seen fit to name Parihaka A.

I know many stories of my family's years on the Taranaki coast, but none include this detail. I doubt I am the only Pākehā to have inherited an orthodox settler account of my history in this country, one which emphasises rights of belonging but which, ‘lightly pencilled’ (Freeman 2020), dances nimbly over the heterodox coloniser narrative of confiscation, theft and violence. That other story does not feature in my history: I have forgotten Parihaka.

In this paper, I would like to end that forgetting. Following Sleeter (2011), I wish to insert the adjective ‘critical’ in front of the comfortably beige term ‘family history’ by piecing together a more honest, politically contextualised family history. Family histories are not History but they are history: for ‘what is a nation, really, aside from a collection of

families?’ (Buchanan 2018, p. 89). They are the first histories many of us learn, and it is through their telling that we make our initial sense of our place in this world, and in their retelling that we reproduce and reinforce those understandings. So, what is in them—and, more importantly, what is left out—is of consequence. It matters that we get the detail right, particularly when something long forgotten is recovered in that process.

The article begins with a brief précis of the methodological approach informing critical family history, following which the empirical materials of this study—comprising my great-grandfather’s service record with the AC and the history behind three historical land titles—are set out. Most of the discussion is then given over to assessing (1) the consequences of this history for settler subjectivities, (2) the reasons colonial settler families sometimes forget their history, (3) the grim paradox of poor Irish farmers’ participation in the dispossession of Māori (the indigenous people of Aotearoa) farmers and, finally, (4) the temporal import of the ‘financial footholds and cushions’ (Sleeter 2014) generated from three farms on confiscated land.

2. Of Stories, Big and Small

Family histories are often narrated within the confines of and interpreted through dominant cultural narratives (Sleeter 2015; although see Hawken 2019). Lacking context, they are stripped of certain meanings and imbued with others. In this respect they do political work: in the context of a colonial settler society that labour includes both reaffirming certain tropes and rendering other, more discomfiting matters entirely invisible.

The narratives I grew up with conform to type. Were you to listen to them you would hear about the family farms and quotidian life on the Taranaki coast (the Coast), and you might learn—if you listened carefully—that Andrew Gilhooly had come from Ireland and had been in the AC, but you would not hear a single reference to his participation in the invasion, destruction and occupation of Parihaka. Nor would you gain any sense of the stories behind the three Gilhooly farms. On those matters I grew up in silence.

For the better part of my life, I have been comfortable with that. Recently, however, I have begun to look for answers to questions I find I can no longer avoid, as well as for means of making sense of what that search has uncovered. In both endeavours I have drawn on critical family history (CFH), a methodological and theoretical approach to family history most closely associated with the work of Christine Sleeter (1999, 2011, 2014, 2015), and which calls for detailed historical research that ‘situates one’s individual family history in a broader historical, cultural and socio-cultural context’ (Sleeter 2014, p. 23).

The CFH scholarship appeals for several reasons. Its point is to lift the veil by explicitly connecting our small, intimate stories with the large, sweeping forces that shape nations—in which regard it is a corrective to the claim that doing family history ‘speaks not to our sense of historical significance but to our need for personal identity’ (Davison 2000; cited in Buchanan 2018, p. 89). In the context of Aotearoa, CFH renders visible the relationships of power that are woven through the fabric of a colonial society. Such relations are often opaque to those of us who continue to benefit from them, languishing comfortably in Buchanan (2009) ‘dementia wing’ of history. However, Sleeter’s method drags colonisation right into the living room: critical, contextualised engagement with my family’s history transforms colonisation from something that happens out there at the rarefied level of the state into something that is right here at home. It is one way of getting the big, consequential stories down to scale.

The object of CFH is to ‘situate families within larger contexts that draw attention to unequal relations’ (Sleeter 2015, p. 3). Sleeter’s own work draws on critical theory, critical race theory and critical feminism (Sleeter 2015). Each is apposite to my history. To take two examples: (1) the commodification of land, and the subsequent privatisation of the profits derived from farming, drove the alienation of the Māori land the Gilhoolys came to farm, and (2) my great-grandmother’s purchase of one of those farms has been airbrushed out of the family stories, the assumption long having been that her husband owned all

three properties. (In fact, he held title to one: his wife owned a second and the third was leasehold land.)

There is theorisation in this paper, but at this early phase of the project the empirical disposition of CFH takes primacy. That method has two phases. The first requires acknowledging the political nature of orthodox family stories, genealogies and the sorts of miscellany produced for family, school and church reunions. These types of accounts are often richly textured but in colonial settler societies there is always a whiff of amnesia to them. They tell of ships arriving, of the clearing of land, of overcoming hardship and privation, and of establishing families and putting down roots. Early in the piece there will invariably be an origin sentence such as: 'My family arrived in Taranaki in 1874 and have been here ever since.' However, what came before those sentences almost always remains untold. Settler family history begins with the purchase of the family farm (or its urban equivalent).

It is important not to dismiss those stories, for as primary sources they reveal a great deal. However, it is what they do not reveal—the absences and the silences—that most matter. Addressing those lacunae—ending the forgetting, as [Buchanan \(2009\)](#) puts it—requires systematic purposive research. For this article, that has entailed engaging with primary historical sources including family wills, military service records, contemporary newspaper reports, electoral rolls, the parliamentary record, historic land titles, cadastral maps, minutes of Native Land Court meetings, documents held by the Public Trustee and the archival records of the Waitangi Tribunal. Secondary sources have been consulted to round out the picture. Additionally, out of that process a new and decidedly unsettled history of my family's time on the Coast has emerged.

3. The Sound of Silence

The 'very big stories' (the colonisation of Aotearoa) and the 'very little stories' (my great-grandfather's part in that project) are always intertwined ([Buchanan 2012](#)). To begin, then, something of the large historical truth in which small personal truths lie needs to be set out.

3.1. *Te Pāhua (The Plunder)*

On the morning of the 5 November 1881, 644 AC and 945 volunteer troops invaded Parihaka pā. Media coverage of what then occurred was suppressed, and it would be two years before any official account of what took place on that and subsequent days would see the light of day in Aotearoa ([Riseborough 2005](#)). When it did, courtesy of a document tabled in the United Kingdom House of Commons, it became known that:

Parihaka had been taken without resistance; that it was 'completely broken up'; that about 1500 men, women, and children had been arrested; and that six were imprisoned, including Te Whiti and Tohu, who were held on charges of sedition. Titokowaru, who had recently returned from prison with the ploughmen [see below], was imprisoned again for failing to procure sureties to keep the peace. Images of a fuller picture escaped later to the public arena; images of assaults; rape; looting; pillage; theft; the destruction of homes and of hundreds of hectares of crops; the forced relocation of 1556 persons without money, food, or shelter; the introduction of passes for Maori to facilitate the military's control of movements in the area; and the suspension of trials and other legal safeguards when it appeared that lawful convictions might not be achieved. ([Waitangi Tribunal 1996a](#), p. 206)

The invading force arrived at Parihaka along the South Road, a military road my great-grandfather helped lay and the construction of which has been described as the first assault on Parihaka ([Buchanan 2009](#)). The invaders' waystations included the confiscation of 1199,622 acres of Taranaki land via executive fiat in September 1865 ([Waitangi Tribunal 1996a](#), pp. 91–92) and the non-violent—but highly active, politically astute—resistance of Tohu Kākahi and Te Whiti o Rongomai's ploughers and fencers to the surveying and

settling of the ‘great knuckle’ of Taranaki (Buchanan 2009, p. 39). Additionally, it included the imprisonment (without trial) of some 640 of those resisters in gaols, caves and islands in Te Wai Pounamu (the country’s South Island). A little later would come the Indemnity Act 1882, which gave retrospective protection to AC troops, volunteers and others from legal responsibility for all of their actions before, at and after Parihaka.

Parihaka has become the ur-exemplar of the use of violence by the colonial administration to destroy Māori self-determination. Parihaka was invaded because it was a powerful centre of Māori authority, autonomy and protest. Te Whiti and Tohu’s community was potent, and therefore a threat to the legitimacy of the colonial state. The purpose of the invasion was to bludgeon it into submission; the point of the subsequent occupation was to annihilate it. Following the invasion came the destruction; after the destruction was the occupation; and once the military operation ended the agricultural campaign to complete the alienation of Māori land began. My great-grandfather was there for all of it.

3.2. *From Kiltelly to the Coast*

To understand how that came to be requires briefly returning to Ireland. Andrew Gilhooly was born in 1855, one of 10 children, the son of tenant farming people who paid £26 and 10 shillings a year to William Anderson—an English squire who lived in Devonshire—for the privilege of working a 29 acre tenement in Ballynagreenage, a small village in the parish of Kiltelly, east County Limerick (Griffith’s Valuation 1851). At 19 he and his sister, Bridget (who settled in and saw out the rest of her life on the West Coast of Te Wai Pounamu), took assisted passage on board the New Zealand Shipping Company’s 800-ton clipper the *Wennington*, which sailed from Gravesend on the 21st January 1874 and arrived in Wellington three months later (Archives NZ 2020).

On the 27th August 1877 Andrew joined the AC. The AC was established under the Armed Constabulary Act 1867, which centralised various policing, detective and military functions in anticipation of the departure of imperial troops from Aotearoa (the last of which had left by 1870) (Hill 1989). It was a heavily armed mobile police force, tasked with imposing the peace in areas of unrest and helping to establish the conditions for settlement through the pacification of Māori, the construction of roads, bridges and telegraphs, and so forth. Bluntly, its job was to ‘impose the norms of the conqueror upon the conquered’ (Hill 2000, p. 34).

Andrew was initially based in Kumara, on the West Coast, but by 1881 he was in the AC’s camp in Pungarehu—just a mile and a half from Parihaka. Four artefacts place him there. The first is a photo my mother has, taken in 1881, in which Andrew stands (as captain) alongside the other men who make up the AC’s Coastal rugby team. The second is tucked away in the 11 June 1911 edition of the *Opunake Times*, where a small item names him as one of the AC contingent that completed the South Road between Okato and Ōpunake in 1881 (*Opunake Times* 1911). The third is a tattered handwritten note scribbled by his youngest daughter, Liz, which says that in the early 1880s her father was ‘manpowered to [the] Armed Constabulary—Pungarehu (Parihaka)’.

Additionally, the fourth is Andrew’s service record (Archives NZ 1891). Having joined the AC in 1877 he repeated the oath of allegiance at the force’s Cape Egmont camp on the 8th September 1880, suggesting that he was part of the small AC contingent watching over the erection of the Cape Egmont Lighthouse following its relocation north from Mana Island. He reattested a third time at the Parihaka camp on 10th September 1883. By then No. 3 Co. was the only AC presence left at Parihaka: it remained there until March 1885, and as late as March 1884 Major Forster Goring’s company was still the largest garrison force in Taranaki (Prickett 1981). As for Andrew, he left the pā for the East Coast in November 1884. By that time, he had been at Cape Egmont and Parihaka for at least four years.

4. Land

Parihaka is not just an ‘invasion day story’ (Buchanan 2009, p. 177). The pā was occupied by the AC for over four years, and the 5 November 1881 is but one (albeit perhaps

the signal) event in the long history of the alienation of Taranaki Māori from their land. My great-grandfather took part in both campaigns of dispossession, the military and the agricultural, transforming himself in the process from a gauche armed constable into a respected member of a settler/coloniser community.

4.1. Section 44

In time, Gilhoolys would be found on three farms, all within a stone's throw of Parihaka. On the 13th November 1895, Andrew—back on the Coast following years away, five of them spent in Dunedin as Bombardier No. 67 in the artillery corps of the Permanent Militia—paid £350 for legal title to the first of these, the 114 acres comprising section 44 Block 12 of the Cape Survey District ([LINZ 2019b](#)).

The farm is immediately adjacent to the South Road, right in the middle of what were once Parihaka's best cultivations ([Waitangi Tribunal 1996b](#)). It is also on the seaward side of the road, and thus part of a strip of land which, had the construction of that route been correctly carried out, would not have been made available for purchase under freehold title. (Farms towards the ocean were sold to Pākehā farmers but most of those on the mountain side of the road became West Coast leasehold land). In the event, when the South Road was completed it was found to be closer to the mountain than the original survey plans had provided for. Whether intentional or otherwise, the effect of the miscalculation was to make 5000 additional acres of land on the seaward side of the road available for sale and settlement. My great-grandfather's first farm was part of that tranche.

4.2. The Farm on the Opourapa Road

The leasing of Māori land is a baleful story. Briefly, in 1882 the colonial government finally began returning to Māori some of the land it had confiscated in 1865. However, via the West Coast Reserves and West Coast Settlement Reserve legislation (and their various amendments down the years) responsibility for the administration of native reserves was vested in the hands of a government administrator, not the Māori owners of the land. The Public Trustee was tasked with acting for the benefit of 'the natives to whom such reserves belong' and for 'the promotion of settlement' ([Waitangi Tribunal 1996a](#), p. 258). These two requirements are fundamentally incompatible and the second has won out.

The principal means of promoting settlement took the form of leases offered to Pākehā farmers. West Coast leases had (and to an extent still have) a particular character. The majority were offered with a perpetual right of renewal, locking Māori out of their own land. Not only did leaseholders enjoy security of tenure, they could mortgage, sub-let or transfer a lease to others. On the other hand, the Māori owners of the land could not negotiate leases and peppercorn rents were systematically set by the Trustee. Moreover, after 1892 the Trustee could also charge Māori to live on what remained of their own land. Some Māori owners paid more for these licenses than some Pākehā farmers paid to lease Māori land. Here is an example: in 1909 occupation licenses for the Parihaka reserve 'were set at between 2/6 and 5 shillings per acre per year [while] [t]he rate for the West Coast Reserves in the same area was between 1/6 and 2/6 per acre per year' ([Benson and Hohaia 1996](#), p. 204).

If you turn off the South Road up the Opourapa Road and head towards the mountain, a couple of hundred metres up on the left you will reach Section 2 Block 13 of the Cape Survey District. The farm sits on land that in the 1880s was part of the Waiotama Block. In 1882 the Crown granted the block to Whareuanui and 45 others, specifying—as it typically did—that the grant was 'absolutely inalienable' ([Benson and Hohaia 1996](#), p. 187). It was nothing of the sort, of course: control of Waiotama was quickly vested in the Public Trustee and from 1894 parcels were being leased to farmers on 21-year leases with a perpetual right of renewal. By 1908, 75% of the 'absolutely inalienable' block had been alienated—including the 200 acres of Section 2, which my great-grandfather leased in 1902 ([LINZ 2020](#)).

One farm purchased outright in 1895 and a second leased in 1902. Both on confiscated land. There is one to go.

4.3. Parihaka A

In 1916 the Native Land Court amalgamated the Te Upokomutu, Ngatirangitumamao, Ngatimoeahu and Parihaka Kainga blocks into a single consolidated Parihaka Block. One farm, section 102 Block 12, was partitioned into Parihaka A, a section of 103 acres, and Parihaka B, which was a smaller piece of 36 acres. Ownership of the first was vested in Hori Teira, while Rihikau was acknowledged as the owner of the smaller parcel.

On 31 August 1921, just a year before Andrew Gilhooly died, his wife, Kate, paid Hori Teira £2947 for title to 98 acres worth of Parihaka A ([LINZ 2019a](#)). Two small slices were excluded from the sale: an urupā (cemetery), which remained in Māori hands, and a small piece of land which was added to another title.

For three reasons I find this transaction the most unsettling. The first concerns the urupā. Whose people lie there? Did anyone tend them? Was the ground in which they lie fenced off from the cows (yes, my mother reassures me)? The second is because the land title that precedes the 1916 granting of the land to Hori Teira shows that Parihaka A had once been part of the larger Upokomutu Block which, in October 1883, had been granted as a reserve to Te Whiti, Tohu and 65 others. This land whispers of powerful people and of times that reach far further back than 1921 or 1916. The third reason is the name the Crown's authorities saw fit to allocate to the land: Parihaka A. It is the very first piece of land listed in the historical documents that set out in remorseless detail the alienation of the Parihaka Reserve ([Benson and Hohaia 1996](#)). Pākehā authorities presumed to give this land a name that contains multitudes. Additionally, members of my family grew up on it.

The family farm: it is such a benign, inoffensive descriptor. One last thing about my family's farms. In 1882 the Crown decided to hold back 5000 acres from any future reserves as 'an indemnity for the loss sustained by the government in suppressing the . . . Parihaka sedition' ([Waitangi Tribunal 1996a](#), p. 238). Those 5000 acres included the Opourapa Road farm and Parihaka A ([Waitangi Tribunal 1996c](#)). Put another way, the land on which my family established itself in Taranaki was withheld from its rightful owners because of an act of sedition that had been pacific, non-violent and whose protagonists had welcomed my great-grandfather and his AC comrades into Parihaka with gifts of food.

5. The Politics of Forgetting

Per the Sleeter prescription, the adoption of a critical perspective requires a form of engagement with the empirical materials described above (and their consequences) which is at odds with the way I have typically engaged with my past. Several questions duly emerge.

5.1. *It's a Long Way from Ballynagreenage 1: Settler Subjectivities*

The first is: 'What have I forgotten?' Not only has my historical connection with Parihaka been largely blotted out, but to a degree so have my Irish roots. Or, rather, those origins have been repurposed (or perhaps simply misplaced with the passage of time here on the other side of the world) in the interests of articulating a new identity—that of 'settler-farmer'—which is as important for what it is not (poor; tenant farmer; Irish) as for what it is (comfortably off; landowner; British).

Andrew came from poor Irish farming people who leased a 26 acre piece of land. When he died in 1922, he controlled 314 acres; add Kate's farm and in a short period of time (26 years) my great-grandparents held sway over 412 acres of land. That is 16 times the size of the small plot Andrew's father worked, and nearly 17% more land in total than the 362 acres the Devonshire squire owned in Kiltelly parish. It is an extraordinary economic transformation in a single generation.

What is more, the economic transfiguration was mirrored by a social metamorphosis, the family farms enabling my great-grandparents to cast off the class and ethnic strictures of Ireland and become respected members of the Coastal farming community. In 1895 Andrew played an instrument at the annual district bachelors' ball where, the local newspaper tells us, the 'refreshments were all that one could wish for' and where the dancing 'commenced

punctually at 8 p.m. and did not break up until nearly 4 a.m.’ Six years later he won first place in the Rhubarb section of the Farm and Garden Produce division of the Cape Egmont Horticultural Society’s Third Annual Show, and he was a stalwart of the Rāhotu Athletics Club and the Pungarehu School Board. He has long since ceased to be an Irish labourer and has become a settler-farmer, which is an altogether better thing to be.

The use of the rhetoric of ‘settlement’ is one of the ways in which old identities are discarded (Connerton 2008). To settle somewhere means you have to leave someplace else, shedding the accumulated weight of centuries in so doing. To settle is to bring calm to chaos and order to disorder; to be a settler is to be part of that civilising project. In this way, the term ‘settler’ works not just as a means of claiming social status but also of distinguishing ‘we’ (who arrived) from ‘they’ (who were here before). There can be racism at work here, the glib use of the noun ‘settler’ collapsing old enmities (English oppressors vs. Irish nationalists) into a new cleavage between the white/coloniser/civiliser and the non-white/Māori/savage. This is hardly an original insight, but in the context of my history it needs stating nonetheless. To make that point as clearly as possible, let me transcribe verbatim a letter sent to the people of Parihaka in 1913 by the Public Trustee from whom my great-grandfather leased the Opourapa Road farm. Berating them for their stewardship of their own land, he takes it upon himself to tell the inhabitants of the pā that:

There is a law relating to noxious weeds applying to pakeha and Maori (sic) alike. It is that the owner and occupier of land must keep the land clear of all weeds or he is liable to not obeying this law. Maoris (sic) have not been fined yet, but they will be in the future or else they will suffer the other penalty i.e., they will run the risk of losing possession of their lands. It is necessary for the welfare of all the people, Maori (sic) and Pakeha (sic) alike, that all lands should be made productive of wealth. The race for supremacy among the nations is becoming so keen that the British supremacy on the seas will be challenged unless further strength is added to the Empire’s defence by an increase in the ships of war. This is the only manner in which we can feel assured that our country will not fall into the hands of an enemy.

We shall not be able to sustain an increased navy and the other burdens of Government unless we cause the land to produce more wealth. For these reasons, it is necessary that all lands should be brought into cultivation. At the present time the Maoris (sic) of Parihaka are enjoying many of the advantages of the progress of civilization in Aotearoa without in any way bearing the burdens of it. This is especially so in regard to the question of roads, as the Parihaka Maoris (sic) have contributed very little as rates to the Road Boards. (Waitangi Tribunal 1996b, pp. 7–8)

Not only are the people of Tohu and Te Whiti receiving peppercorn rents and paying an occupation licence to live on their own land (having previously ‘enjoyed the advantages of the progress of civilisation’ in the form of the destruction of their pā), they are charged with imperilling the safety of the realm by not ripping out the gorse, ragwort and blackberry which had been introduced from Europe. Additionally, this from the holder of a public office with a statutory obligation to act for the benefit of ‘the natives to whom such reserves belong’, and who administers a lease my great-grandfather holds.

Andrew arrived in this country an Irish labourer and died a settler. He never relinquished his British passport. Three things matter here: (1) that my great-grandfather was able to leave behind earlier identifiers; (2) that he did so on the basis of access to and ownership of land taken by the colonial state from Taranaki Māori, and (3) that this particular identity claim has resonated down through the years, such that I comfortably resort to the vocabulary of ‘settlement’ rather than that of ‘colonisation’. In doing so, of course, I am engaging in one of the practices of forgetting.

5.2. What Is Gained by Forgetting?

A second question—‘What is the point of forgetting?’—flows from the first. [Buchanan \(2012\)](#) scepticism that forgetting is necessarily hitched to the experience of pain provides a powerful point of entry into a response to this query. Her two-fold case is that forgetting is typically associated with a sense of loss (of memories, emotions, people, events and so forth), and that these losses are generally assumed to be painful. Buchanan’s analysis is rooted in the history of Māori, for whom the experience of colonisation has required a deliberate and sustained process of forgetting. To do otherwise would be to live in an eternal present of shame, humiliation and pain ([Connerton 2008](#)). Although the ontological nature of the experience is fundamentally and diametrically different, the core logic also applies to families of the first colonisers, for whom the experience of forgetting might also be constructive. Once upon a time my forebears must have known about their connection with Parihaka: after all, one of them was there on the 5 November 1881 and later settled on and leased confiscated land. However, at some point the forgetting began.

I do not imagine that the loss of those memories was all that painful. On the contrary, to forget those ties—as I have successfully done for the better part of my life—is a state to be sought and maintained. For what I have gained by forgetting my connection with Parihaka (or by not bothering to learn about it, which amounts to much the same thing) is not having to deal with the discomfort, politics and ethics of my association with acts of violence and dispossession. Pain is the least of my concerns. There is no virtue in this sort of forgetting.

I gain one other thing by ‘consign[ing] some things to a shadow world’ ([Connerton 2008](#), p. 63), and that is the right to claim my place in one of this country’s foundation stories. It is through forgetting Parihaka and commencing my family story with the three family farms that I constitute myself as ‘settler’, thereby asserting my place in the master narrative that puts farming people at the centre of the nation-building project in Aotearoa. There is a meritocratic element to this: if my family has made it in this country it is through our own efforts; if we can lay claim to being part of the backbone of the nation it is because we have worked hard to make the land productive. No mention need be made of how we came to be on the land on which those efforts—which were tangible and real—took place.

Such forgetting is deliberately constitutive. It is a form of purposive emotional and cognitive labour which takes effort and investment ([Buchanan 2012](#)), and in my case its purpose has been to build and then maintain a settler-farmer identity. This type of forgetting is not benign: what Stanner calls the ‘cult of forgetfulness’ ([Stanner 1969](#), p. 25; cited by [Borell et al. 2017](#), p. 3) creates the preconditions for ignorance and the systematic refusal to engage with the temporal effects of colonisation. Families are central to the social organisation of this work ([Norquay 1999](#)). They are the curators of the stories and the keepers of the memories; it is within families that the origin myths are crafted and subsequently cemented down through the long years of retelling. It is they who choose what is remembered and what is tacitly forgotten.

5.3. It’s a Long Way from Ballynagreenage 2: Paradox

There is a nasty paradox which is easily overlooked when my history is told as if it began with the purchase of section 44 in 1895. Even a cursory review of Irish history will reveal some compelling reasons why my great-grandparents might have wanted to put significant distance—literal, emotional, social and economic—between themselves and Ireland. I cannot make assumptions about their views on these or any other matters (there is no extant written basis on which to do so), but I am struck by the grim irony that my Irish family was involved in alienating Taranaki Māori from their land.

The first feature of that particular elephant in my historical room is that Andrew was a member of a military-policing force that was closely modelled on the Irish Constabulary, ‘infamous for its coercive mobile patrols, [and] able to concentrate en masse to pre-empt or suppress outbreaks of civil dissent, unrest or rebellion’ amongst his own Irish people ([Hill 2010](#)). When he joined the AC in 1877 the erstwhile victim turned perpetrator.

The second incongruity is that I am a descendant of a people with a history of violent subjugation, dispossession, famine and dispersal. Under Cromwell, who in 1649 picked up where the Tudors had left off, over 11 million acres of Irish land were confiscated (Edwards 2005, p. 161). Most of that land was granted to soldiers from the occupying English forces. By the mid-18th century land set aside for Irish Catholics amounted to less than 5% of the country's total landmass (c.f. the 11% of land from the Parihaka Block that remains in Māori ownership today). Yet, when Andrew Gilhooly returned to the Coast as a farmer and my people broke with that past, overthrowing Cromwell's horrific legacy by becoming landholders in their own right, they did so because another people had been dispossessed.

In Taranaki you became a settler only by unsettling those who were there before you. It is not possible, on the Coast, to tell a tale of settlement without also telling one of colonisation: at the risk of labouring the point, my great-grandfather got to be a farmer only because the land he farmed had been taken from Māori. However, I have never referred to myself as a coloniser. The narrative skips straight to the 'officially sanctioned understandings of immigrants and immigration' (Norquay 1999, p. 179). It is the settlement story that prevails.

My sense is that this is because in contemporary Aotearoa the term 'settler' is more palatable than is 'coloniser'. I do not know if this has historically been the case, but to the extent that it is now it is something of a nonsense, because the two are of course inextricably connected: you cannot have the one without the other having first taken place. Nonetheless, these days, the political work tacitly asked of the noun 'settler' is that of taking the harsh edges off colonisation.

5.4. *Of Power and Privilege*

If you are sufficiently privileged and of a mind to do so, it is easy to dismiss colonisation and its consequences as things that play out at the level of executives, legislatures, courts, militaries and bureaucracies, and which—to the extent that they are of any relevance to the contemporary lives of families and individuals—happen to other people. However, the evasion is hard to get away with when a critical engagement with one's own history reveals the very episodes, events and occurrences—invasions, occupations, the purchase or leasing of others' land—that are the material engine of colonisation. When this happens colonisation, with its benefits and burdens, plummets from high politics to the lived and the personal. The question of privilege becomes impossible to avoid.

The points made in earlier sections regarding the economic and social transformations my great-grandparents wrought on the basis of confiscated land are directly apposite. It may be unseemly to raise matters of wealth in polite society but they have to be. The commodification of land—achieved through a statutory and administrative apparatus designed to impose the norms and practices of private ownership where none had previously existed—enabled the coloniser state to alienate Māori from their land and then to sell that land. The economic rents subsequently generated were largely monopolised by the state and Pākehā landowners. Māori were largely, although not entirely, excluded from enjoyment of those benefits.

The particulars of the lease on the Opourapa Road farm that my great-grandfather renewed on the 6 January 1922 illustrates the extent to which those imperatives were institutionalised. For instance, should Andrew happen to stumble upon 'mines, metals, minerals, coal, lignite, slate or freestone' while walking the land, ownership of those resources remained with the Native Trustee. As lessee he undertook to paint all wooden constructions on the property every four years; keep the premises in a 'clean and husband-manlike' fashion; ensure that 'all live hedges and fences' are properly cut and trimmed; and maintain all fences to the level demanded by the Fencing Act 1908. The rites, rituals and assumptions of a productivist model of land ownership are all here.

I cannot accurately quantify the full value of the economic returns that accrued to my great-grandparents and their six children, because their wills do not specify the value of the land and residential properties that were placed in trust following their deaths. There are,

however, three clear snapshots of the ‘historical windfall’ that my Pākehā family extracted from the ‘historical trauma’ (Bell 2020) of Taranaki Māori.

First: the combined purchase price of sections 44 and Parihaka A amounts to \$329,698 in today’s terms. Just under \$70,000 of that went directly to the state (for the South Road farm) and the balance went to Hori Teira (for Parihaka A). None of it went directly to the iwi (tribes) from whom those properties had been taken.

Second: the lease taken out on the Opourapa Road farm in 1902 was worth the equivalent of around \$6504 per annum to the Public Trustee. I cannot establish how much of that made its way to the farm’s Māori owners, nor how many people it would have been distributed amongst; neither can I ascertain what profit my great-grandfather made from his own labours on the farm. I do know, however, that his lease remained fixed at £35 for 21 years, and that even roughly adjusted for inflation Andrew paid less than twice what his father had paid William Anderson—and Andrew’s property was nearly 7 times larger than the farm in Ireland. Clearly, Irish landowners did much better out of their tenants than Māori ones.

The third and perhaps most illuminating profile of the ‘financial footholds and cushions’ (Sleeter 2014) the farms provided my ancestors is found in the will left by the youngest of my great-grandparents’ four sons. On his death in 1955 this man, who was a Roman Catholic priest, left NZ\$1353 to the Church so that 25 masses could be said for the repose of his soul, a further NZ\$27,027 to the Wellington Archdiocese’s Seminary Fund, and just under NZ\$200,000 to his two sisters. As individuals priests have limited earning capacity, and so it is reasonable to assume that these figures represent his share of the family’s accumulated wealth.

That wealth was not uniformly distributed, and most of the Gilhoolys did not amass significant wealth through the ownership or disposal of the farms. To the best of my knowledge the extent of my mother’s benefit was the £100 she and each of my grandfather’s other daughters received in his will (his sons got quite a bit more). Nonetheless the prosperity that flowed from the land has supported the endeavours of later generations of the family in various ways: it lies behind the purchase of other properties and houses, bequests to daughters and sons, support with the costs of education and so forth. Additionally, each of these has its own multiplier effect, which goes some way to explaining why intergenerational transfer of wealth is ‘the most significant factor in the current socio-economic position of descendants’ (Borell et al. 2017, p. 28; original emphasis). Thus, far from being ‘a relic of the past’, the fruits of the family farms are better seen as ‘a living inheritance.’ I am not questioning that individual merit and hard work have played a part, but there is no getting away from the fact that the inter-generational transfer of resources within my wider family began with the institutionalised dispossession of Māori. And who is to say that those benefits would not have accrued to the original owners of the land had it not been taken from them and then sold to my great-grandparents?

Those material resources are not all that the land gifted us. My people have long since moved away from the Coast but our origin story will forever be there. That is where it began for me in Aotearoa. Where my great-uncle, who completes a Doctorate of Divinity in Rome at the age of 21, is born; where my grandfather establishes himself as a powerful figure in Taranaki rugby; where my mother grows up and escapes from, meeting my father in the process. I still drive her out to the Coast when I visit her in New Plymouth—along the war road my great-grandfather helped build and which carried the force that invaded Parihaka. That land gave my ancestors a place of their own on which to stand. It is where I began the process of becoming Pākehā.

This is what privilege looks like. A fork in the road here; a path not taken there; a serendipitous encounter which means that I come from this place and not that one. All that has flowed from this ontological security (Innes and Steele 2013), notably the break with poverty and the shift in status from tenant farmer to landowner, stems from the colonisation of this country and the alienation of land from Taranaki Māori. None of this

would have happened in the way it has had things been otherwise. However, my historical privilege is grounded in the historical trauma experienced by Māori ([Borell et al. 2017](#)).

6. Conclusions: A Tale of Two Stories

Acknowledging that privilege begs a final question: What is the nature of the obligation incumbent upon those of us who have benefited from colonisation? The politics of apology are necessarily an element of any response to that question. The history of institutional apologies for what occurred before, at and after Parihaka is a shoddy one. [Buchanan \(2012, 2018\)](#) has traced that history, identifying fully nine occasions on which the Crown has officially apologised for te pāhua (and at least one additional apology in 1981 from the New Zealand Police Force, one of the successors to the AC). To a greater or lesser extent each of them has been lacking. Perhaps because the Crown presumed that an apology was appropriate (or was what Parihaka wanted) without talking with those to whom it was to be offered; perhaps because ministers and officials unilaterally determined the content and substance of the apology; perhaps because it was thought that an apology would heal the pain and to make peace—and was thus a precursor to moving on.

The ninth and most recent Crown apology to Parihaka is codified in Te Ture Haeata ki Parihaka/Parihaka Reconciliation Act 2019. It makes for sobering reading, listing seven pieces of parliamentary legislation the state has used in its attempt to ‘destroy Parihaka’s resistance to the loss of their traditional lands.’ However, out of a process led by the people of Parihaka a Parihaka–Crown Leaders’ Forum, a relationship agreement between the Crown and Parihaka, and a Parihaka Fund have emerged. These initiatives have emerged from a constructive process in which Parihaka was closely involved, including in deciding upon the content of and ceremonial aspects surrounding the apology. It did not meet all of the tests for a meaningful political apology (see [Buchanan 2012](#); [Thompson 2002](#)) but it is an improvement on previous efforts. Perhaps this time things will be different.

Apologies by the Crown are one thing. However, what of the direct descendants of the men who participated in the invasion and who benefited from the confiscation of land? What about the politics of personal apology? One significant dimension of this type of politics concerns whether or not Pākehā like me have the right to instigate an apology. If the principles Buchanan places at the heart of a sincere, meaningful also apply at the individual level, there is no case for me to unilaterally determine that an apology is the right thing to do. That is for the people of Parihaka to decide. To assume that an act of contrition on my part is going to be welcomed on theirs (rather than experienced as an intrusion at best or as another form of violence at worst) would be to repeat the mistakes of the past. Privileging my emotional need to apologise is really just another way of trying to make myself feel better.

It would be another matter were the people of Te Whiti and Tohu to gift me the opportunity to apologise. However, to engage with any such process in good faith would require of me a more honest appraisal of my history. It would be contemptible were I to continue to peddle my ‘tacit silences’ ([Connerton 2008](#)); deeply offensive if I was to resist the incursions of the ‘big’ stories of colonisation on my ‘little’ one of settlement ([Wright 2010](#); cited in [Buchanan 2018](#)). In this respect, perhaps critical settler family histories make best sense as a necessary but insufficient precondition to decolonisation; as ways of transforming people’s understandings of their family histories, the better to shine torches into the heart of colonial darkness.

The decolonisation of the exogenous (public spaces, institutions, laws, etc.) is one thing, but there is an equal imperative to decolonise that which is endogenous—the memories, stories and received wisdoms through which the descendants of coloniser families call their histories and identities into existence. It does not pay to disparage these small histories: they may not be History but they are history nonetheless. More than that, they are our first histories, and they matter to the ways in which we make sense of and engage with the world. Therefore, best I get my story straight. Best I put aside the orthodox settler narrative and tell a heterodox coloniser story. Best I connect the private and public

realms and, in doing so, both apprehend the part I have played in the colonisation project and do something about it.

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